

Coincidences, Intuition, and Spirituality

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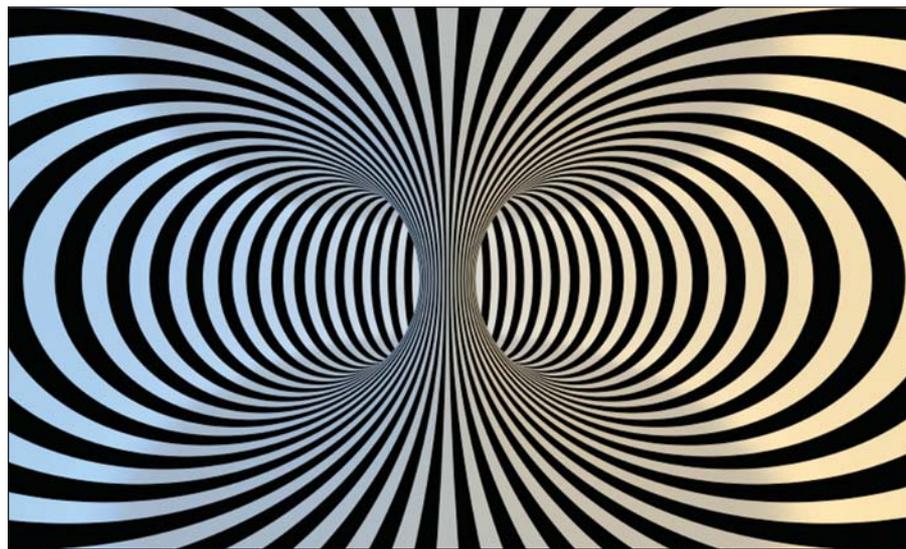
Intuition is an elusive phenomenon. There is still much to understand about it, such as what causes one person to be more intuitive than another. Is it something an individual is born with or something an individual must learn? What is known is that intuition is a way of perceiving the world that is fast, automatic, associative, and separate from reason. In its most extreme form, intuition is a psychic ability, a sixth sense. It occurs immediately, has an emotional aspect to it, and the individual experiencing it may not be conscious of it or be able to use language to describe the experience. Intuition is one means by which “weird” coincidences may be understood, yet little is understood about the relationship between them.

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Intuitive people report paranormal beliefs, experiences, and abilities¹ — a “...dissolution of the limits usually perceived between the body and the exterior space”² — and are more likely to endorse a metaphysical worldview.³ In weird coincidences, a concept first proposed by Coleman and Beitman,⁴ people appear to blend external and internal experiences in their thoughts, sensations, and/or feelings. Those with paranormal beliefs may, however, overestimate how often they experience weird coincidences because they tend to overestimate the occurrence of unusual things according to random probabilities.⁵

The Weird Coincidence Scale-2 (WCS-2) measures how often people experience weird coincidences and how they interpret the meaning of these experiences. Coleman and Beitman⁶ found a significant, positive correlation between the interpersonal factor

(telepathic experiences concerning other people) of the WCS-2 and the faith in intuition factor on the Rational-Experiential Inventory-R (RREI).⁶ They also report the agentic factor (weird coincidences in work and education) positively correlated with faith in intuition.⁶ Similarly, those having paranormal experiences appear to be high in intuition as measured by the Meyers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI).⁷ Intuitive people report the ability to physically feel what others feel at a distance, a type of weird coincidence measured by the WCS-2 (simulpathity).²

The purpose of this study is to explore correlates between weird coincidences and intuition. This research is the result of a substudy based on initial research for a doctoral dissertation for which we created a structural equation model to understand how intuition contributes to

TABLE.

Bivariate Correlations between Scores

	WCS-2_A	WCS-2_I	WCS-2_AI
Attig Information Scale	0.480**	0.627**	0.570**
MBTI Sensing Intuition	0.195*	0.082	0.116
RREI Experiential	0.257**	0.163	0.518**
WCS-2 Agentic (WCS-2_A)	1	0.544**	0.509**
WCS-2 Interpersonal (WCS-2_I)	---	1	0.405**
WCS-2 Analysis/Interpretation (WCS-2_AI)	---	---	1

* $P < .05$, ** $P < .01$, $n = 122$.

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spiritual experience, spiritual belief, and religiousness, and to test hypotheses about these relationships.⁸

We expected weird coincidences to be part of a spiritual experience construct and the analysis and interpretation of weird coincidences to be part of a spiritual belief construct. Instead, we found that experiences of weird coincidences were more strongly related to intuition as defined by our structural equation model.

METHODS**Participants**

A sample of 123 undergraduate students participated in this study; 71.5% were female and 28.5% were male, ranging in age from 18 to 49 years with an average age of 23 years. Among the participants, 63.4% described themselves as white; 15.5% as Hispanic; 6.5% as Asian/Pacific Islander; 6.5% as mixed ethnicity; 4.1% as American Indian/Alaskan Native; and 4.1% as black. Forty-one described themselves as Christians; 34 as Catholic; 17 as agnostic; 12 as Jewish; and 27 identified a variety of other belief systems.

MEASURES**Intuition Scales**

The RREI⁹ includes both rational and experiential (intuitive) ability and engagement subscales (eg, “I believe in trusting my hunches”). Coefficient alpha reliability was 0.92.

The Meyers-Briggs Type Instrument (MBTI) Form M¹⁰ assessed intuition defined as perception of possibilities, relation-

ships by way of insight, and knowledge coming through hunches (eg, “Would you rather be considered a practical person or an ingenious person?”). Coefficient alpha reliability was 0.89.

The Attig Intuition Scale (AIS)⁸ assessed three factors of intuition: premonitions/psychic tendencies; intuition about others; and intuitive decision-making. Coefficient alpha reliability was 0.89.

The Weird Coincidence Scale

Participants completed the Weird Coincidence Scale (WCS),¹¹ but only those items retained for WCS-2⁴ were used in scoring. This scale assesses how often participants experience meaningful coincidences and how the items are interpreted and analyzed for meaning and is made up of: the interpersonal subscale (WCS-2_I); the agentic subscale (WCS-2_A); and the analysis/interpretation subscale (WCS-2_AI). Coefficient alpha reliability was 0.76 for the agentic subscale, 0.77 for the interpersonal subscale, and 0.76 for the analysis/interpretation subscale.

RESULTS**Correlations**

The Table provides the obtained correlations between measures. The WCS-2 agentic factor correlated significantly with intuition as measured by AIS (0.48, $P < .01$), MBTI (.20, $p < .05$), and RREI (0.26, $P < .01$). The WCS-2 interpersonal factor correlated significantly with intuition as measured by the AIS (0.63, $P < .01$). The WCS-2 analysis/interpretation factor

correlated significantly with intuition as measured by the AIS (0.57, $P < .01$) and the RREI (0.52, $P < .01$). The correlations among three factors of the WCS-2 were positive and significant: WCS-2_A and WCS-2_I (0.54, $P < .01$); WCS-2_A and WCS-2_AI (0.51, $P < .01$); and WCS-2_I and WCS-2_AI (0.45, $P < .01$).

DISCUSSION

We predicted a correlation between experiences of weird coincidences and intuition because intuitive people are more fully present in the moment and attend to their own emotions and those of others; as such, they would be more likely to notice weird coincidences. All three factors of the WCS-2 correlated significantly with the AIS, confirming the original prediction. The occurrence of weird experiences (WCS-2_A, WCS-2_I) correlated most strongly with the AIS and, as a result, combined with it to form the construct of intuition in the structural equation model. Initially, we assumed that weird coincidences are a type of spiritual experience because many find spiritual meaning in weird coincidences, but empirically, weird coincidences fit within the intuition construct. They were not a spiritual experience in and of themselves. Noticing weird coincidences is part of being intuitive; being intuitive leads to spiritual experience. Whether being intuitive encourages more spiritual experiences or just the noticing of them is unclear. Spiritual experience led to spiritual belief in the structural equation model. Part of what made up spiritual belief in the model was the belief that weird coincidences are meaningful (WCS-2_AI). The experience of weird coincidences appears primary; the belief that they are meaningful is secondary.

The experience of weird coincidences was part of the intuition construct partly because of an overlap of assessment items. The AIS and the WCS-2 Analysis and Interpretation factors scales assess intuitive social skills and decision-making not guided by analytical thought. Intuitive people may notice more details of their external

and internal experience and read people better, giving them more material in which to find weird coincidences.

Not every measure of intuition corresponded closely to the WCS-2. The MBTI intuition measure correlated only with the agentic factor of the WCS-2, and did so weakly. The agentic factor is about weird coincidences guiding work and education, whereas the MBTI intuition measure is about preferring to use one's imagination beyond the here and now of the five senses. Those who feel guided by weird coincidences also have a creative way of approaching future possibilities that are not readily apparent. The weak relationship between weird coincidence and intuition as defined by the MBTI is likely because the MBTI defines intuition narrowly, having to do with creative problem-solving, not as a general way of thinking, feeling, or approaching the world. The MBTI correlated weakly with the AIS and was ultimately not used to help form the intuition construct in the structural equation model. When intuition is defined more generally, as the AIS and the RREI do, a stronger relationship is observed between intuition and weird coincidence.

Intuition as defined by the RREI (ie, trusting one's intuition and using it to make decisions) was related to weird coincidences in work and education and the belief that weird coincidences are meaningful, but not to interpersonal weird coincidences (thinking of something and then having it happen, or feeling a strong connection to another).

Similarly, Coleman and Beitman report a correlation between faith in intuition and the agentic factor in their research.⁶ Those who are highly intuitive may be more likely to notice weird coincidences in their work and education; or perhaps after having an unusual number of weird coincidences in work and education, they may be more likely to attend to their intuition, which may help them to notice further coincidences that may prove helpful to them. Because Coleman and Beitman found a positive correlation between these two in

their study,⁶ it is not clear why intuition and weird coincidences of the interpersonal type do not relate in this study.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

This research was limited to undergraduate students, most of whom were relatively young. Also, most of this population identified as Christian, Catholic, agnostic, or Jewish. Future research should investigate populations with greater age and religious variability. If learning enhances intuition, then older people may be more intuitive than younger people. Also, formal education, which emphasizes analytical thinking, may affect intuition negatively, so intuition may be greater in younger or less well-educated people.

Researchers should investigate whether those who frequently experience weird coincidences have an increased attentional capacity (which could contribute to heightened intuition). This could help determine whether those who frequently experience weird coincidences experience more coincidences, or just notice them more often. If there is a relationship between increased attention and noticing more weird coincidences, it would be useful to investigate whether increasing attention capacities could increase the noticing of weird coincidences and perhaps the ability to understand them in a way that is meaningful and beneficial.

There is mounting evidence that meditation increases attention capacities.¹²⁻¹⁸ Buddhist meditative tradition asserts that meditation creates a "reflexive" awareness that heightens sensitivity to the body and the environment, enhancing the emotional tone (by reducing emotional reactivity), and enhancing active cognitive schema,¹⁶ all of which could enhance intuition. Meditation could be a powerful tool in helping people to both notice and to understand the meaning of weird coincidences.

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